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Student Politics, Teaching Politics, Black Politics: An Interview with Ansel Wong

By Rob Waters

Ansel Wong is the quiet man of British black politics, rarely in the limelight and never seeking political office. And yet his 'career' here – from Black Power firebrand to managing a multimillion budget as head of the Greater London Council's Ethnic Minority Unit in the 1980s – spells out some of the most important developments in black educational and cultural projects. In this interview, he discusses his identification with Pan-Africanism, his involvement in student politics, his role in the establishment of youth projects and supplementary schools in the late 1960s and 1970s, and his involvement in black radical politics in London in the same period, all of which took place against the background of revolutionary ferment in the Third world and the world of ideas, and, were not without their own internal class and ethnic conflicts.¹

Rob Waters (RW): When did you come to Britain from Trinidad?

Ansel Wong (AW): I came to Britain in 1965 to go to university in Hull where they offered a joint degree of English and American Studies. At that time I was interested in Caribbean literature as well as American literature and Hull had a professor that looked at that. There we were part of RSA – the Radical Student Alliance – and one of my key cohorts was a guy called Tom Fawthrop who wrote a little pamphlet on examinations.² I was quite active in student politics – it was around the time of the Vietnam War, around the time of the bombing of Hanoi and so on. So, Hull was twinned with Hanoi. We raised money to send an ambulance. So there was a lot of activism. And actually we occupied the university for a number of days, and elected our own senate. And I was one of the six people elected as the student senate.

In the same year, 1965, I got involved with the West Indian Students Centre, the key centre for students, funded by a number of Caribbean governments. So coming down to London during the university holidays, I naturally gravitated to the Students Centre, because it was central, Earl's Court; it offered a three-course meal for 16 shillings; it had a bar which stocked Caribbean drinks; and it was an opportunity to meet students from other universities. Also it was the home of the Union of West Indian Students, of which I became an Executive Committee Member.

RW: So was it quite a busy centre when you joined?

AW: Oh yes, very busy, very much a students' centre. And we were engaged in a struggle to open it up to the community, and extend membership to people who weren't at the university. I think the radicalism came really out of the attempt to make it more accessible. The Centre was always a focal point for students during their summer break. So it was an opportunity, with a good library, to come and study, to come and get involved, to meet each other. It was a club, in that sense, so there was a gentility to it. And therefore when *we* came in, we wanted it to be far more expressive of what was happening in the Caribbean, and also what was happening in the community. Pressures came from outside as well, from activists like Obi Egbuna.³ People like Andrew Salkey and John La Rose were encouraging us to be far more accessible, because they also used the Centre as a meeting point for the Caribbean Artists' Movement. Andrew Salkey and John La Rose engaged with us, and in a sense became our mentors.⁴

We were witnessing a kind of turmoil in education at the time - radicalism, radical thought, Liberation Theology - we were grappling with all that. So when you saw evidence of the elitism of the Caribbean upper class in the Centre, it became a focal point. Also there was pressure from outside, we can't deny that; people who would say, 'you're being elitist'. And at the same time things were happening among students in Canada.⁵

RW: When did the Centre start opening up to black radical groups like Obi Egbuna's?

AW: some of the activities that we tried to put on were invaded by community organisations and individuals. Other times we put on events that perhaps reflected their concerns, but none of the organisations outside in the community really had a foothold in the Centre. They would just come. We tended to host Caribbean Prime Ministers who were visiting the UK and they would come along to talk to the students, and obviously that would be a good time for people who had a particular political agenda to come into that meeting and make it known. One event I remember is the Prime Minister from Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams, addressing a meeting which I chaired. At the time in Trinidad there was a bus strike, so people supporting the bus strike in Trinidad and Tobago came in with their placards and voiced that.⁶ Althea Jones-Lecointe, and her husband, Eddie, were the ones who led the bus boycott event against Eric Williams.⁷ Well, they shouted and screamed and so on, and then the Prime Minister just turned his hearing aid off—a bit silly, yes—and went on. The meeting went ahead. But they made their point.

And Michael X would turn up, I remember him turning up while we had an event, and there was a bookstall, and he signed his book for me. But he would come up, and obviously he was very articulate and very charismatic, so could make an intervention at these meetings.⁸

So there was that kind of interaction between what was happening in the Centre and the community wanting to express themselves. They came in as interlopers, as you'd call it. They tried to piggy-back onto what was happening in the Centre, or to make their views known by pressurising us into a particular point of view. Some of us were receptive. We wanted it to be a community centre, open to everybody, so that membership would be expanded. At the beginning membership was quite restrictive. They could refuse you entry if you hadn't an NUS card, so that became a proposal. So one of the first things we were trying to do was to try to stop the use of the NUS card as the entry as a key to the Centre, so that anybody who wanted to come in who was of Caribbean descent, could come in. We had to do things gradually, like anyone who had an NUS card would sign in somebody as their guest. That was the first step. And then we had events which became public in the sense that anybody could attend, not just NUS card holders. So it was a kind of gradual process of pushing, pushing boundaries and getting little concessions, little concessions.

We won the argument insofar it became far easier for people to gain access. But at the same time, the government was deciding this could not continue, and they just stopped the funding. The building became a place for the Caribbean governments – used by the embassies, the high commissions. This was because there was a very strong opposition to the community being engaged and being involved. The Centre was being funded by Caribbean governments exclusively for its students. And they felt that other people were benefitting from the subsidised services.

It wasn't articulated, but we certainly acknowledged the role played by the radicalisation of the Centre, and that we were able to call meetings and invite people like the athletes who gave the Black Power salute at the Olympics. Anybody who would come to black sort of things were invited. Increasingly our newsletters and publications reflected that ideology. So if you look you can see that black activism is coming to the fore, and that was obviously a concern. Our understanding at the time was that this was raised at government level. The Centre played a very important part in the development of many people and also it is a lay by in terms of a journey to a recognition.

RW: When I read material from the West Indian Students Centre, there's this sense that there was an attempt to rework your activity around ideas about blackness, or appeals to blackness, and that this would offer some new futures, some new possibilities.

AW: It was. It was a continuous attempt to try surreptitiously to do that, and at times quite aggressively, as we began to hit obstacles. So we began to recognise the cultural context, the political context, the social context in which we existed. First of all we had to recognise that we were students, and students came and work to go back. We were on a student visa, and we were going back. Increasingly, there was a growing recognition that you may stay here, that you may settle here, you may have a life here. And therefore your focus shifted from just trying to be accommodating and enjoying life to saying we need to find that future, we need to define that future. And that, in a sense, meant engaging with the settled communities. Through all that protest from 1965 to 1969 there was a growing awareness of that, and therefore there was a kind of gradual strategy to make things meaningful to us in terms of our blackness, in terms of our culture, in terms of situating our heritage firmly within the British landscape. That took time, and talking to people, and being influenced by people, people who wrote. For me it was particularly around art and culture, less so the politics.

The politics was a Liberation Theology, for me, Paulo Freire and others influenced me.⁹ Because one of the reasons for me coming here was also to become a Jesuit priest. I lost my faith at university in Hull. I made several attempts to reclaim it. I moved from the digs into the Catholic chaplaincy to live, and to try to do that. So that was my personal struggle to find faith, to find a position. And even within the Liberation Theology there was kind of accommodation but not fully.

So when I came down to London, I was involved in praxis, basically, trying to find a way of finding a space for myself. Finding a space in terms of the Africanisation of the struggle, and being seen as different, yes, but yet occupying a leadership role, but not necessarily totally defining that African ideology. So all of these things were happening to me, because I come from a country which is very much diffused. It's Indian, Asian, *and my father is Chinese, my mother is African*, and Carib and so on, and Portuguese. So all of that struggle I was going through, and yet I was in a public position of a kind of leader in the Centre, driving that agenda there, the political organisation. So yes, it is a far more complex situation than the documents would appear, because I have never really articulated some of those inner turmoils and tensions.¹⁰

RW: Because you felt that the articulation of blackness was often around an Afrocentric ethnicity that didn't necessarily accommodate the diversity of your own background?

AW: It didn't fully accommodate the diversity of heritage and history that I came from. Nevertheless, I accepted that. I committed to Pan Africanism. I committed to the African struggle for liberation, engaged with that as well. And yet, there was still that hint, and it became obvious at times, when people would make reference to it at public meetings and so on. But, you know, you have to be thick skinned in that sense, and stick to the ideology, and the dogma as opposed to people's perceptions of identity and colour of skin.

It was one of several kinds of contradictions that we had to deal with, and we all had to deal with personally. Like Andrew Salkey and John La Rose, they were married to white women, and many of them were accused of not being true liberationists, Africanists in that sense. We all had those kind of personal things which intervened with the actual politics, the political politics, and the tensions which that brought. If it's one thing to say, there is complexity in relationships, complexity in distances travelled, that sometimes didn't always make sense, and had to be completely a reworking and rethinking process, individually as well as collectively. But less so collectively, because we really didn't address some of those issues, particularly as Caribbean people, from such a multiplicity of heritages and ethnicities. We didn't really become part of that discourse.

RW: And when do you think that did happen? Or do you think it's something which is still to happen?

AW: It hasn't happened at all. Not fully, not fully. I haven't seen anything, and nobody has really had the courage to do that, to stand up and say this is some of the issues. There were critical elements where people would stand up and criticise us—me—other people saying, you know, you're a Chinese, there's no position for you in this struggle. Individuals, within the community, at meetings, you would get that. But, you know, that's something you have to cope with, and if you felt what you believed in, if you felt comfortable in the ideology, then you could withstand that ignorance.

RW: Is there anything more you wanted to say about the role of the Students Centre?

A lot of things happened there. For example, it was the place where there was the first all-black football team in this country. And that is not recognised. But it is a very important thing where people of Caribbean descent came together and formed a football team, and started to

play in the leagues and lower leagues. That experience in itself is quite good because of the battles, the fights you had on football pitches, and the struggles we had as a football team. I mean our main protagonist was the Conservative Party football team. Every match ended up in a fist fight, at Wormwood Scrubs, yes, it was a major battleground for us. It was the West Indian Students Centre linked to another football team in Finsbury Park. I used to call them the Cavaliers. I'm not sure what they were called. But we had duplicate membership. We shared membership, because there were the students from the Students Centre, and then the other kind of real good players, that came from the Finsbury Park team.

Then the library. The library had a fantastic collection of Caribbean literature, and first editions, and also newspapers and so on. All students came, and you could study there and gain access to all of the reference books and so on.¹¹ We had a librarian among our committee, I can't remember who it was, who had responsibility and was called a librarian.

One of the down sides to opening it up to the community, it became a place where all the gigolos and all the people started to use. Because you could bring the people there, and entertain them. A three-course meal for eighty pence. You could bring them into a bar, subsidised drinks. Caribbean rum and drinks, you know. So we had really interesting things. Certain nameless singers, white singers, white female singers who rose to prominence, used to frequent the place there. People like Tommy Eytle, who was a performer, and used to perform in a lot of the major hotels, used to be there.¹² So it became a watering hole, it became a focal point, it became a meeting point for a lot of the community. Because there was no comparable centre during that time, in any part of the country, in any part of London. So that centre was important. And then around the corner was the West African Students Centre. So there was a synergy between the two as well.

The West Indian Students Centre has occupied a very important position in England, our struggle, and that history needs to be captured and written. A lot of individuals came there and went through there, as artists, potential artists and so on. Sammy Davis was one. One of the struggles we recognised was we didn't own this building, and we wanted to have a building that was our own, comparable to that. There were several attempts to get that going, and I think Sammy at one point volunteered to do a concert for us, and the proceeds that were used would fund a new building. So we spent a lot of time talking to him. Every time he came over to London, Locksley Comrie¹³ and I would go to him at the Hyde Park Hilton, and we would talk and get him involved and engaged and so on. So people like that. Calvin

Hernton, who wrote *Sex and Racism*, he was one of the guys who would come through and lecture and talk. So anybody who came through there, I can't remember all of the names, we invited them to come and speak to us, either privately or in an open forum.

RW: I've seen your name associated with groups like the Black Liberation Front (BLF) and the Black Panther Movement. Were you a member of these groups at that time, too?

AW: The Black Liberation Front, yes.¹⁴

RW: You were never with the Panthers?

AW: No. Not directly. I was linked with friends from there, but not directly.

RW: How did you become involved with the Black Liberation Front?

AW: It started with the whole initiative around setting up a bookshop – Operation Headstart in West Green Road, Tottenham. We had a supplementary school upstairs in Operation Headstart, from which there was a number of off-shoots like the Ujima Housing Association, on Wightman Road we also had a supplementary school, and then there was the BLF, which we all belonged to.¹⁵ Tony Soares was the main mover in terms of that. We had good relations with Eldridge Cleaver, Katherine Cleaver, and so on.¹⁶ We would go over to Morocco to see him when he was in exile there. I edited the BLF paper, *Grassroots*. My name was Adi Kimati. That was my pseudonym as editor of the newspaper, because we were having problems with the police and secret services, so we all used different names.¹⁷ But yes, I was involved in that as one of the activists, and also as one of the people that took leadership roles within the organisation, liaising with international groups and so on.

I think we were recognised for the publication *Grassroots*, a broadsheet paper, which many other black groups did not have. We had the support of the Socialist Workers Party, which printed it. So we had very strong links with the white left, which is again slightly different from the other black groups. Vanessa and Corin Redgrave, and a lot of other people, would give us that support. I had links as well with Libya.

So as the BLF, the key things were we took part in demonstrations, we intervened when people got arrested, through legal advice and through issues around housing and homelessness. We were one of the leading people squatting in short-life property. So we would have a group of people who would go and occupy short-life property, who drew on

expertise within our community, the plumbers, the carpenters and so on, coming to our flat and putting the young people there. A month, two months, three months, you know, and then they moved on. And that was the fledgling efforts that led to the creation of Ujima Housing Association.¹⁸

RW: And was that connected to the wider rise of squatting at that time?

AW: This was the kind of black version.

RW: So it didn't have many connections?

AW: No, no, no. We did our own thing and organised it entirely on our own, yes. Housing, and then Operation Headstart, which is a bookshop in West Green Road, which we bought and started to get involved in that direction, then supplementary schools and classes in Wightman Road.

RW: How did you get engaged in formal teaching and wider black supplementary education? You've been involved in education since you moved to Britain?

AW: After Hull I did a postgraduate certificate at the Institute of Education, in the—it had a very quaint title—Department of Tropical Studies, which was basically second-language teaching. And then obviously from there I taught. I did my teaching degree and then went back and did a Masters at Brunel.

At the West Indian Students Centre we were hoping that we could create a platform for discourses around all of the issues around black liberation and so on, and also at the same time try to initiate projects that reflected that. So, for example, myself and another guy called Jack Hines started the C. L. R. James Supplementary School.¹⁹ We had experience of extra tuition in the Caribbean as a way of gaining academic success – those who went to school in the Caribbean had the extra tuition once they left school. So, accustomed to that, we were then radicalised by the exemplars we were seeing, one example clearly was the Scottish socialist movement, and their educational alternatives. I can't quote you chapter and verse on that, but I remember reading around those issues when I was at university. So we approached C. L. R. James to ask him would he be willing to put his name to this initiative. And he wrote and he said yes.

The main focus was homework sessions and extra tuition, particularly around basic skills. At the same time, for me as an activist, I wanted to make sure that the illustrations, the examples

and everything, had a relation, cultural relevance. As I would say to people, you have a mathematical problem, contextualising with train travel from Kings Cross to Glasgow, why doesn't it be a train from San Fernando to Port of Spain? Or Kingston to Montego Bay, or something like that. So there was that kind of artificial blackening of the curriculum. Then there was the opportunity to teach something of our history and our background, particularly of C. L. R. James, as the name of our school, so we spent a lot of time with the kids doing that as well, and taking them out to visits, the British Museum and things like that.

The other thing was the setting up of the Black Arts Workshop. That was based on the concept of a black aesthetic as had been articulated by people in the USA, Amiri Baraka and others, the idea of art as being functional, art as not just being up on the walls. And also creating the idea of what is considered beauty. So theatre was our way of doing art, oral poetry, and performance. That is how we engaged with the young people who weren't at universities, who were in the communities. Second- and third-generation young people, we brought them in, in terms of dance, movement, music. That was a deliberate attempt to reflect that, which we thought was a little more acceptable to the authorities, because it was art, but art with an edge. Agitprop, radicalism and so on, and we were allowed to get away with that.

Then there were the opportunities for various meetings, so any visiting professor, or visiting athlete, or visiting activist was able to come and speak at our seminars or our events. People like Eddie Brathwaite, because we had a big emphasis on oral poetry and jazz poetry, and a lot of the young people would also write.²⁰ You would see some of the pamphlets that people were writing at the time.

RW: So how did you bring those people in?

AW: Word of mouth. For example, they were involved with the Black Panther Movement at the time, and because of that little grouping of young black people who knew about it, about the Centre, and came and visited, liked it, and stayed. So, we didn't actively recruit people, or advertise or anything like that. Because we ourselves were isolated from the black community in some respects, and therefore felt that, didn't have the kind of pull, but by some kind of osmosis it happened. And people attended.

So they came as very young, youth, and they got involved. I was the artistic director of the theatre group, and taught them dance, and it developed from there. Individuals were writing, and then people were encouraging people to write. I encouraged people to write, I would sit down with them, because I think there was a buzz. I think what you have to recognise was

there was a kind of buzz, and it emboldened people to try things. So they would see the Last Poets, for example. I used to go to America to run an arts project in Harlem. And I would bring back things. I would bring back the artists, and I brought back anything from the Last Poets, I would play that to them. So we would recognise that as something we could do. And that is how it started, and then you had also established poets like Marc Matthews and Basil Smith and Femi Fatoba, who were three elders who were writing as well and who became an inspiration.²¹ And we had impromptu presentations. So we would be going out and be at a bus stop and then Marc Matthews would suddenly whip out his book and start reciting poetry. So it was those kind of engagements that really fuelled a desire in others, and in young people and say, 'oh, maybe I could do that'. So that's how it happened.

RW: Could you say more about what you were doing in the United States?

AW: I ran a project called Shalom in East Harlem Protestant Parish. I had a pastor friend there and he was on his way to a medical conference in Kenya, and he rang me from Heathrow and said 'look, there is nobody in Harlem to run the project. Why don't you go and do it?'. And it took a matter of days to get my flight across, and I just went to run the summer project, paid for by the East Harlem Protestant Parish, and did so for about four or five years, going over every summer.²² They used to call me the mad Englishman, because nobody could understand why I would leave what they thought was beautiful England, for Harlem. And I was living in the heart of Harlem and working with all these drug pushers and there were kids who were on heroin and all sorts. It was quite an experience. It was a learning experience for me 'cos it kind of indicated what could happen in England if we didn't take on active engagement to try and sort things out. I was on the cutting edge of that, and I was seeing that and I'm thinking, you know, 'this could be England'.

It was a summer project working with young kids. I'm taking them out of Harlem, and having creative activities on the streets of Harlem itself. We'd do everything. Playing football on the streets, or working with art forms, or taking them out to wealthy benefactors out on the outskirts of Harlem who had opened up their houses and their swimming pools to us. We would take the kids on the bus, and they come and use their swimming pool, and then they would come back to Harlem. It was that sort of thing. Keeping them busy at all times.

RW: Back in the UK, after the C. L. R. James Supplementary School, you became involved with the Gresham Road Project. How did that happen?²³

AW: I was teaching at Sydenham Girls School from 1971. And having a degree in English, I was teaching A-Levels, and Liberal Studies and all sorts of things at that level. None of the black kids were reaching that level and coming to my classes. So I was teaching all of that, and I was one of the few black teachers in the school, and it was clear that I wasn't engaging with them or helping them in any way whatsoever. I asked to be put down a few sets so that I could actually start teaching them, but the headmistress wouldn't agree. I started lunchtime classes, I brought them all together with other female teachers, as part of a Fourth World Club, women being the Fourth World. We had them come and meet. And I would work with the black kids as well. They'd all pool their money, somebody would go down to Brixton or Forest Hill, would buy ingredients and we would cook Caribbean things, do recipes, all these sorts of things. I would then teach them about their culture, history and background. I taught them dance, Caribbean folk dance. We formed a dance group, and we would perform at other dance groups, all that sort of thing.

That generated a lot of enthusiasm, so when the opportunity arose for me to then do something and the ILEA wanted to move me on, I grasped that opportunity in terms of the Gresham, because they were trying to reorganise things there. The Gresham Road Youth Project was the first ILEA-funded initiative that had a supplementary basis. It was a youth centre first, and then I was brought in to look at the educational initiative, and that was why I set up the concept of a supplementary school.

RW: You established the Gresham Road Project's education centre as an independent supplementary school, the Ahfiwe school, in 1974. What were your plans for Ahfiwe?

AW: The White Lion Street Free School had a great influence on me, in terms of my thinking and what I wanted to achieve and what I wanted to do. It was a white alternative educational initiative in London. And A. S. Neill's Summer Hill school, those were the kind of thing that were on the horizon, and the sort of thing we looked to.²⁴ So what I wanted to do was not just supplementing education, I wanted to have an educational initiative that stands in its own right, that wasn't a supplement. It had to be mainstream. Aspects of that had to be its culture, history, heritage, language and all sorts. So there would be homework sessions, there would be opportunities in terms of basic skills, and this would be a mainstream educational provision on African history, Caribbean history, dance, drama, and all that sort of thing. So that was my vision in 1974, for it to become a proper school.

RW: How big did Ahfiwe get? How many students did you have by the end?

AW: I can't remember, but I know we were very successful in terms of numbers because we recruited from the local estates, and from other schools. We went to other primary schools as well and talked to them and said can we do some referrals. And we were geographically centred, very important in terms of Brixton, in terms of bus routes and so on. Unfortunately just opposite the police station. That had its own dynamic. But I think we were running four, five, six classes, full classes, of at least fifteen people.

RW: And joining you as teachers were also sixth formers, is that right?

AW: Yes, some six formers from Tulse Hill and other schools, and other people who liked what we do and they came and so on and said 'can I help?' And also my friends who I knew on the teaching circuit, headmistresses and people like that would come—'can I help?'

RW: What became of Ahfiwe?

AW: We fell foul of the ILEA, or the local managers, Lambeth Community Relations Council, who, got apprehensive about the growing radicalism, because we started to talk about black studies, and believe it or not the very words 'black studies' were anathema to them. We felt that was important, but they said no, that is not the purpose of the school, the school is basic education. So there's that vision fault-line between the two approaches that maybe led to the closure.

RW: Ahfiwe was closed, and you later became involved with Len Garrison and the Afro-Caribbean Education Resources (ACER) Project, the forerunner of the Black Cultural Archives.²⁵ How different was that project, because that would have been the late 1970s?

AW: I think this was a time of radicalism among teachers, because I was involved in the Caribbean Teachers Association and the whole idea was trying to bring together black teachers, Teachers Against Racism, which I was involved in, and the National Association for Multi-Racial Education. I was a member of all of those.²⁶ So we were buzzing and trying to develop relevant teaching materials and a radical approach to multi-cultural education at that time.

So Len and I attended several seminars and conferences and so on, on world poverty and all that sort of thing. Then he had this idea of trying to develop resources that would be unique and could be used for that drive for multiculturalism, so he turned to me for help, can I do that? So I was on the fringes of that for many, many years, before formally becoming a board

member and then working with him personally on his own writings and so on. I acted as an advisor: I'd look at the content of the teaching material. As a qualified teacher I'd make my comments, and advise in that way. But it was a personal relationship that we had, which started off at conferences on world poverty.

RW: It seems that ACER was different from the supplementary school movement, because it actually tried to re-formulate what goes on in the mainstream schools.

AW: Yes. And there was funding for that, so that became part of that mainstream, because at the time there were lots of other organisations. This was a practical example of how we could intervene in a positive way and get teachers on board.

RW: A few years ago, you decided to donate your papers to the Black Cultural Archives (BCA). Why did you choose to donate these to the BCA, and do you have any hopes for how they might be used in the future?

AW: I donated all of my documents to the BCA as it was a natural response as I had worked with Len Garrison on several of his projects, edited his publications, and served on the management committee of ACER. So there was a natural synergy with his attempts to establish the BCA. I needed no prompting to do so.

I believe that others should do the same as we need to have an accessible repository of the many narratives and histories of the struggles being waged and that were waged by the many activists and pioneers. I hope that the connections between all these narratives will be made, and that could be a mine of information for future researchers.

RW: Ansel, I want to thank you for talking to me today.

AW: Thank you.

¹ This interview was conducted at the Tabernacle, Powis Square, London, on 19 May 2015. Ansel Wong would like to include the following acknowledgement for Jenny Bourne and A. Sivanandan of the Institute of Race Relations and *Race & Class*: 'Both Jenny and Siva were individuals that I owe a lot too, particularly in being influenced by their scholarship and their friendship'.

² Tom Fawthrop, *Education or Examination* (London, Radical Student Alliance, 1968). The Radical Students Alliance (RSA), formed in 1966, called for a firmer stand in opposition to the Vietnam War, and a greater democratisation of student politics and university life, including complete student control over their unions, effective participation of students in all decisions which affected them, and free access to higher education. See Caroline M. Hoefferle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2013), pp. 68-69.

³ Obi B. Egbuna (1938–2014) was a Nigerian novelist and playwright. Egbuna moved to London on a scholarship from Nigeria in the early 1960s, and gained some success as a writer. He soon became involved with African anti-colonial politics and British anti-racist politics, in 1967 founding the United Coloured People's Association, later to become the Black Panther Movement. Egbuna was one of the most vocal Black Power spokespersons in Britain, and received substantial media coverage. In 1968 he was arrested for inciting violence against police at a speech in Hyde Park. He spent six months on remand at Brixton prison before receiving a three year suspended sentence. For his political writing, see *Black Power in Britain* (London, Universal Coloured People's Association, 1967); *Destroy This Temple: the voice of black power in Britain* (London, MacGibbon & Kee, 1971); *The ABC of Black Power Thought* (Lagos, Third World First Publications, 1973). See also Robert Bunce and Paul Field, 'Obi B. Egbuna, C. L. R. James and the Birth of the Black Power Movement in Britain', *Twentieth century British history* (Vol. 22, no. 3, 2011), pp. 391-414.

⁴ The Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) was a literary-artistic collective of Caribbean writers, artists and critics in Britain established by Jamaican novelist Andrew Salkey, Trinidadian poet and publisher John La Rose, and Barbadian poet Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite in 1967. CAM held their regular meetings at the West Indian Students Centre from 1967 to 1970. See Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement: a literary and cultural history* (London, New Beacon Books, 1992).

⁵ In February 1969, black students at Montreal's Sir George Williams University staged a protest against what they saw as the deliberate failing of black students by a member of the biology faculty, blockading themselves in the university's computer centre. A fire started in the building, and when smoke was seen pouring out some white onlookers were heard to shout 'let the niggers burn!'. The occupation ended in violence as the police stormed the computer centre, and the leaders of the occupation were given prison sentences of four months and eighteen months. The events had a substantial impact among Caribbean students throughout the diaspora, and were a significant factor in the series of events leading to the Black Power revolt in Trinidad and Tobago in 1970. See David Austin, 'All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada', *Journal of African American history* (Vol. 92, no. 4, 2007), pp. 516-539; Valerie Belgrave, 'The Sir George Williams Affair', in S. Ryan, T. Stewart, and R. McCree, *The Black Power Revolution of 1970: a retrospective* (St. Augustine, University of the West Indies Press, 1995), pp. 119-131.

⁶ On 21 April 1969, more than 650 bus workers in Trinidad and Tobago's Transport and Industrial Workers Union went on strike. The conflict quickly escalated as Eric Williams's government declared the strike illegal under the recently-passed Industrial Stabilisation Act, while strikers continued in defiance of the legislation. The stand-off is often interpreted as a precursor to the wider crisis of Trinidad and Tobago's Black Power revolt of 1970. See Raoul Pantin, *Black Power Day: the 1970 February Revolution. A reporter's story* (Santa Cruz, Hatuey Productions, 1990), pp. 13-18; James Millette, 'Toward the Black Power Revolt of 1970', in Ryan, Stewart, and McCree, op. cit., pp. 59-94.

⁷ Althea Jones-Lecointe, a Trinidadian postgraduate student at University College London, became the new leader of the Black Panther Movement after Egbuna's departure from the organisation in 1968. Her husband, Eddie Lecointe, also held a leading position in the Panthers. See Organised Youth, *The British Black Panthers and Black Power Movement: an oral history and photograph project* (London, Photofusion Educational Trust, 2013).

⁸ The book was Michael Abdul Malik, *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X* (London, André Deutsch, 1968). Malik (1933–1975) was, alongside Egbuna, the most widely recognised face of British Black Power in the late 1960s and early 1970s, though many have questioned the extent of his activities or influence. He returned to Trinidad in 1971 and established a commune in Arima. In 1972 he was convicted for the murder, on his commune, of local labourer Joseph Skerritt and Gale Ann Benson, daughter of Conservative MP Leonard F. Plugge. Hanged in 1975, he remains a controversial figure. See John Williams, *Michael X: a life in black and white* (London, Century, 2008); Derek Humphrey and David Tindall, *False Messiah: the story of Michael X* (London, Hart-Davis MacGibbon, 1977).

⁹ Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was a Brazilian educator and philosopher. Freire's radical pedagogy, drawing on Marx, Fanon, and Catholic liberation theology, advocated a reconceptualization of the learning environment to conceive students as co-creators of knowledge, and to democratise the languages and tools of knowledge production. See his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972 [1968]).

¹⁰ Wong's papers are held by the Black Cultural Archives, London.

¹¹ A list of library books held at the West Indian Students Centre in 1967 included works by Stuart Hall, Wilson Harris, Donald Hinds, Cheddi Jagan, C. L. R. James, George Lamming, John La Rose, Colin MacInnes, Claude McKay, Roger Mais, Edgar Mittelholzer, V. S. Naipaul, V. S. Reid, Andrew Salkey, Léopold Senghor, Derek Walcott, and Eric Williams. At this time the library contained only three texts on the United States of America: Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944), C. L. R. James's *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (1953), and Paul Robeson's *Here I Stand* (1958). However, by 1969 Students Centre leaders began a plan to radically overhaul the library to accommodate the literature and political demands of Black Power. A student newsletter of 1969 records that 'Our aim is to make it a library that will cater for the needs of all our projects and the community; the place where the record of our struggle will be housed/catalogued for future reference. Our collection of Black writers will be extended to include our American and African Brothers and also small publications like Newsletters, Newspapers, Magazines, etc.' Subsequent editions of the newsletter carried requests for donations of books by James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson, Malcolm X, and Richard Wright. See *West Indian Students Centre: library list* (18 September 1967), British Library Andrew Salkey Collection (uncatalogued); *Bumbo* (No. 2, u.d. [Autumn 1969]), Black Cultural Archives, Ansel Wong papers, WONG/1/1.

¹² Tommy Eytel (1927–2007) was a Guyanese musician and actor who played jazz and calypso in London's nightclubs in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹³ Locksley Comrie, an engineering student at a Brixton technical college who moved to London from Kingston's Trench Town district in the late 1960s, was a key figure in the radicalisation of the West Indian Students Centre before his return to Jamaica in 1969. See Walmsley, op. cit.

¹⁴ The Black Liberation Front (BLF) was founded in January 1971 by former members of the Black Panther Movement's North and West London branches, and led by Goan activist Tony Soares. The group maintained close links with the US Black Panther Party, took its ideological lead from Marxism, and was sympathetic to the cultural nationalism of Ron Karenga. The BLF's newspaper, *Grassroots*, enjoyed wide circulation in the 1970s, available in major cities across Britain. See Rosalind Eleanor Wild, "'Black Was the Colour of Our Fight": Black Power in Britain, 1955-1976' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008), pp. 104-109.

¹⁵ The Headstart Education and Leisure Programme was a supplementary school and youth club for black youth run from the BLF's offices at 54 Wightman Road, London, from 26 September 1971. The BLF later established Operation Headstart, a community resource centre and bookshop, opened at 25 West Green Road, London, on 8 February 1976. See *Grassroots* (Vol. 1, No. 4, September 1971); 'Operation Headstart: Background Information and Progress Report' (22 January 1976), George Padmore Institute, Black Education Movement, BEM/3/1/3/8. On the Ujima Housing Association see footnote 18, below.

¹⁶ On these connections, see Anne-Marie Angelo, "'We All Became Black": Tony Soares, African-American internationalists, and anti-imperialism', in Robin D. G. Kelley and Stephen Tuck, eds, *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 95-102.

¹⁷ Following *Grassroots*'s republication of a US Black Panther Party newsletter article containing the recipe for a Molotov cocktail in 1972, Tony Soares stood trial at the Old Bailey in 1973 on charges of attempting to incite the murder of persons unknown. During the trial, Detective Sergeant Westacott of Special Branch confirmed that it was his duty to keep black political organisations under investigation. See 'Points of the Month', *Race Today* (Vol. 4, No. 5, May 1972), p. 150.

¹⁸ The Operation Headstart Management Committee was behind the establishment of the Ujima Housing Association, founded in 1976 with the objective of providing housing for black applicants. Ujima was Britain's first and, until its end in 2008, biggest black housing association. See 'Ujima Housing Association', London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4450/C/05/0342.

¹⁹ Jack Hines, a Jamaican student holding the post of Discussions Officer, was at the core of West Indian Students Centre organisation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Plans between Hines and Wong for a supplementary school began in June 1969, resulting in the C. L. R. James supplementary school, one of the first of the wave of black supplementary schools established over the following decade.

²⁰ Brathwaite was a pioneer and early champion of Caribbean vernacular writing. See his *The Arrivants: a New World trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), and *History of the Voice: the development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984).

²¹ Marc Matthews (Guyana), Basil Smith (Jamaica) and Femi Fatoba (Nigeria) were three young poets at the heart of the black arts poetry of early 1970s London. All three were regularly involved in West Indian Students

Centre events, and became regular attendees at CAM events in the early 1970s. While anthologies of their work did not appear until the 1980s, several black journals in Britain published their poetry in this period.

²² Shalom, Inc. was a youth project established by Methodist minister Harold Eads in East Harlem in the late 1960s. Eads led a programme of intercultural and dramatic music programmes, aimed at bringing together youth from the diverse ethnic and religious communities of the area. See 'Thursday Parade', *New Yorker* (16 August 1969), p. 26; Letty M. Russell, *Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1979), pp. 111-112.

²³ The Gresham Road Project was a youth centre established at 1 Gresham Road, Brixton, in the early 1970s. Initially a combined youth centre and educational centre, the youth centre provision was renamed the Abeng Centre in 1974, while the educational centre was re-launched as the Ahiwe ('All for We') school.

²⁴ The White Lion Street Free School was founded in 1972 in a derelict house near London's Kings Cross Station. The school taught around forty pupils, some of whom were referred by social services. The principles of the school were an abandonment of hierarchy among teachers, and between teachers and students, sharing of work (including chores), equality of rights and decision making, and voluntary attendance. The White Lion became the best-known example of a libertarian free school in Britain, and many radical educators followed its activities closely. See John Shotton, *No Master High or Low: libertarian education and schooling in Britain, 1890-1990* (Bristol, Libertarian Education, 1993), pp. 226-238; Nigel Wright, *Free School: the White Lion experience* (Leire, Libertarian Education, 1989). Alexander Sutherland (A.S.) Neill (1883-1973) was a Scottish educationalist who pioneered a form of libertarian schooling in which pupils were given freedom from authority and encouraged to develop their emotional health. His Summerhill School, established in 1924, enjoyed a revival of interest from radical educators in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the birth of the free school movement. See Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill: the permanent rebel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

²⁵ Len Garrison (1943-2003) joined his family in Britain from Jamaica as a child in 1954. In the 1960s, he became involved in youth work in Brixton, teaching classes in black history, and he continued this interest through degrees at the University of Oxford's Ruskin College and the University of Sussex. The ACER Project was established by Garrison in the autumn of 1976, and brought together his twin interests in education and black history and culture. Aiming 'to collect and disseminate material drawn from the African and Afro-Caribbean sources related to the black child's cultural background for use in the multi-cultural classroom', it was funded by the Inner London Education Authority, and housed at their Centre for Urban Education Studies. Garrison's collection of material grew and in 1981, in the wake of the Brixton 'riots', he founded the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), as a community resource.

²⁶ The Caribbean Teachers Association was founded in 1972 as an umbrella organisation for debating, and providing advice and support on, difficulties faced by black teachers and students (see 'The Caribbean Teachers Association', London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4463/D/05). It was funded by the Community Relations Commission, and later by Urban Aid. Teachers Against Racism, founded in 1971, was a London-based organisation advocating the integration of black studies into school curricula, and to co-ordinate new black studies courses. The National Association for Multi-Racial Education (NAME) was founded in 1965 as an organisation concerned with teaching English to non-native speakers. In the early 1980s NAME was challenged by many of its members to abandon its liberal-multicultural politics in favour of a firmer denunciation of societal and political racism, and recognition of antiracism as a radical political project. See Alastair Bonnett, *Radicalism, Anti-Racism and Representation* (London, Routledge, 1993), pp. 109-112.